



# Mental health matters

UNISON and Mind working together to support the mental health of emergency workers





# Contents

1. Emergency workers and mental health – key facts	5
2. Looking after yourself	6
3. Seeking help for yourself	9
4. Seeking help – for others	16
5. Getting organised around mental health	22

UNISON's president Eric Roberts chose the Mind Blue Light Programme as his presidential charity because it is all about the welfare of the men and women who work in our emergency services – ambulance, fire, police and search and rescue – across the UK.



Before his sudden and untimely death in November 2016, Eric had served the London Ambulance Service for 42 years with the passion and dedication that all of us in UNISON came to know so well.

The men and women who work or volunteer in our emergency services across the UK are more at risk of experiencing a mental health problem than the general population - but are less likely to access support.

Mind are experts in mental health and the Blue Light Programme works in partnership with ambulance, police, search and rescue and fire services to provide practical and positive ways for staff to stay well for work.

It offers a confidential help line that gives advice on mental health or well-being to emergency services staff, volunteers and their families. It supports employers with training to support staff to stay well and prevent problems getting worse.

This booklet is for anyone working in emergency services or for anyone who wants to find out

how they can support someone with a mental health problem.

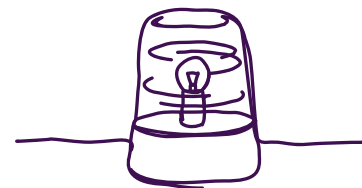
The booklet will show you how you can look after yourself as well as how you can seek help for yourself and others.

If you're a UNISON rep it'll also show you how you can help colleagues and ways to negotiate better workplace policies with your employer.

And although Mind's Blue Light programme is aimed at emergency services workers, much of the information and advice contained in this booklet is relevant to anyone.

Eric cared passionately about helping and supporting staff in the emergency services and he was determined that we should produce this booklet so that staff and UNISON members would be able to access the help they need

Dave Prentis  
General Secretary  
UNISON



# 1. Emergency workers and mental health – key facts

Mind launched the Blue Light Programme back in March 2015. Since the programme launch, Mind has undertaken extensive research that reveals the extent of the impact on mental health of staff and volunteers working in the emergency services.

Research with emergency services staff and volunteers shows:

- 92% have experienced stress, low mood and poor mental health at some point while working for the emergency services
- Nearly two-thirds have contemplated leaving their job/voluntary role because of stress or poor mental health
- Emergency services staff and volunteers are more likely to experience a mental health problem than the general workforce, but are less likely to take time off as a result
- 46% feel that they would be treated negatively if they talked about their mental health problem.

## Triggers for poor mental health

Research also revealed that, while experience of distressing or traumatic events did impact mental health, other significant triggers of poor mental health include:

- long hours
- excessive workload
- pressure from management
- organisational upheaval.

## High incidence of suicidal thoughts

Worryingly, Mind's research also showed that more than one in four (27%) people had contemplated taking their own lives due to stress and poor mental health while working for the emergency services. 5% had made an actual attempt to take their own life due to stress and poor mental health.

## 2. Looking after yourself

### What can I do to build resilience?

There may be times or situations in your life that are more difficult than others. The capacity to stay mentally well during those times is called 'resilience'. This section suggests ways you might be able to develop and strengthen your resilience, so that you can deal with everyday life and face difficult situations without becoming unwell.

#### Talk about the way you feel

If you are facing a difficult time, talking about the way you feel with someone you know and trust can often help.

Your colleagues, trade union rep, friends or family may be able to offer you practical help or advice and give you another perspective on what is causing your problems. Even if they can't help, often just talking something through and feeling that there is someone to listen and understand you can make you feel much better.

#### Build healthy relationships with people

Building and maintaining constructive relationships with people is an important part of staying mentally well. If you spend time around

positive and supportive people, you are more likely to have a better self-image, be more confident and feel able to face difficult times. In return, if you are caring and supportive to other people, you are more likely to get a positive response from them and so feel better about yourself and your ability to play an active part in society.

This is particularly important if lone working is a significant part of your job, and you don't get as many opportunities to talk and socialise with colleagues.

#### Look after your physical health

If you have good physical health, you are more likely to have good mental health. Sleep patterns, diet and physical activity all have an impact on your mental wellbeing.

Sometimes it can be difficult, or even impossible, to maintain regular sleep, diet and exercise patterns because of work. If this is the case, try to establish as much regularity as you can, or set time aside to look after your physical health after busy or stressful periods.

## Physical activity

Physical activity is good for mental health, particularly if you exercise outdoors. Being active can help reduce depression and anxiety and boost your self-confidence.

## Relax

It's important to make time to relax, even if you don't feel under stress. This may mean going away for the weekend, spending an evening doing something you like, or even just taking a five-minute break to look out of the window. Learning a relaxation technique, such as breathing exercises, yoga or meditation, can also help you relax and reduce stress levels.

Remember – relaxation is not the same as recreation. Hobbies and other activities can become stressful if they become excessive.

## Identify mood triggers

Knowing what affects your moods can help you take steps to avoid or change the situations that have a negative impact on you. Even if you can't change the situation, knowing your triggers can help you remember to take extra care of yourself during difficult times.

Keeping track of your moods in a mood diary can help you work out what affects your mental

wellbeing and recognise changes in your mood that would be difficult to spot otherwise.

## Look after yourself during difficult times

Be careful not to put too much pressure on yourself to carry on as normal. You may need to take a break from your usual responsibilities, for example reducing your social activities or workload. If you are finding it difficult to cope on your own, don't be afraid to ask for help.

**Stay safe.** If your feelings become overwhelming, and you have suicidal thoughts or you think you may self-harm, remember that you can pick up the phone at any time of night or day and talk to the Samaritans (freecall 116 123, open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year).

## Learn to accept yourself

One of the most important steps in maintaining mental wellbeing is to learn to accept yourself.

Here are some tips to help you increase your self-esteem:

- Try not to compare yourself to other people.
- Acknowledge your positive qualities and things you are good at.



- Use self-help books and websites to help you change your beliefs.
- Be assertive – don't allow people to treat you with a lack of respect.

### Make a resilience plan

You can make a plan for yourself by firstly writing down:

- things that have a positive effect on your wellbeing

- things that have a negative effect on your wellbeing.

Then create a plan for how you might be able to change this, by writing down:

- things you could try to improve your situation
- who you might ask for help.





### 3. Seeking help for yourself

Seeking help for a mental health problem can be a really important step towards getting and staying well, but it can be hard to know how to start or where to turn to.

#### When is it ok to seek help?

You might feel uncomfortable seeking support for your mental health, and feel like you should be able to stay strong. Or you might have been feeling this way for so long that you think you can't be helped. But **it's always ok for you to seek help** – even if you're not sure if you are experiencing a specific mental health problem.

*I always felt like I had to stay strong, that I couldn't be weak; but that was the worst thing I could do, really, because everyone's got their limit, and I had reached mine.*

#### Who can I talk to?

The best way to start is usually by talking to a health care professional, such as your GP.

Your GP can:

- make a diagnosis
- offer you support and treatments
- refer you to a specialist service.

#### What should I say to my GP?

It can be hard to know how to talk to your doctor about your mental health – especially when you're not feeling well. But it's important to remember that there is no wrong way to tell someone how you're feeling.

Here are some things to consider:

- Be honest and open.
- Try to explain how you've been feeling over the past few months or weeks, and anything that has changed.
- Use words and descriptions that feel natural to you – you don't have to say specific things to get help.
- Try not to worry that your problem is too small or unimportant – everyone deserves help and your doctor is there to support you.

#### How can I prepare?

GP appointments are usually very short, and sometimes you might forget to say things that are important. Being prepared can help you get the most out of your appointment.

Here are some suggestions:

- Write down what you want to say in advance, and take your notes in with you.
- Think about taking someone with you to support you, like a close friend or family member.
- If you have a few things to talk about, you can ask for a longer appointment (you'll need to do this when you're booking it in).

## What might happen when I talk to my doctor?

In your appointment, your doctor will probably make an initial assessment by asking questions about:

- your mood, thoughts and behaviours
- any sleep problems or changes in appetite
- your medical history, and your family's medical history.

They might also check your physical health to rule out any physical illness.

## What might the outcome of my appointment be?

Your appointment might have several possible outcomes:

- **Monitoring** – your doctor might ask you to come back for another appointment before offering any treatment.
- **Diagnosis** – your doctor might give you a diagnosis, for example of depression or anxiety. This doesn't always happen after your first appointment and may only be possible after monitoring you over time or referring you to a specialist.
- **Referral** – your doctor could refer you to another service, such as a psychiatrist or community mental health team (CMHT), or for talking treatments (sometimes called 'psychological wellbeing services').
- **Self-referral** – your doctor could give you details of a service you can contact yourself, for example psychological wellbeing services or a CMHT.
- **Self-help resources** – your doctor might recommend resources for you to use by yourself. These are tools that have been developed by health care professionals,

and can include workbooks, computer programmes or exercise programmes (sometimes called 'exercise on prescription').

- **Medication** – your doctor might offer to prescribe you psychiatric medication.

In most cases, everything you tell your doctor will be confidential. The only exceptions are if you tell them something which makes them believe that you might seriously harm yourself or someone else. In this situation, they will decide how to balance your right to confidentiality with the need to keep you and others safe.

## What decisions can I make?

Making decisions about your treatment should be a conversation, involving both you and your health care professionals:

### Who treats you

Having a good relationship with your GP can be a really important way of getting the right support. If you don't feel you have a good relationship with your current GP, you can:

- Ask or go to see a different doctor, or consider seeking help through independent or voluntary sector organisations.

- Ask to talk to a different type of practitioner, like a nurse, specialist mental health worker or practice counsellor.
- Ask your doctor to refer you to a specialist.
- Self-refer to another service (in some cases). If you self-refer to a psychological wellbeing service or a community mental health team (CMHT), they will normally carry out another initial assessment to see if they can support you.

### What treatment you receive

There are lots of different treatments that can help you manage your mental health. The most common are:

- talking treatments
- psychiatric medication.

### Where you receive treatment

You can be involved in making sure your treatment is accessible to you. There may be some limits, such as if a service only exists in certain areas. But your health care team should try to offer you a choice whenever they can, and work with you to find a suitable location for your treatment.

## Talking treatments

Whatever your treatment is, you should receive it within a reasonable amount of time. However, there can sometimes be long waiting times to access talking treatments through the NHS.

- You can ask your doctor for an estimate of how long the waiting lists are.
- If you are worried that waiting for treatment is going to have a serious impact on your wellbeing, you can ask your doctor what extra support they can offer.

## Medication

- You can discuss with your doctor when you will start medication and how long you will take it for.
- Your doctor should offer you regular appointments to review your medication, but you can ask for a medication review at any time.
- If you need to see a specialist before taking medication, you can ask your doctor for other support while you are waiting.

## Can I seek help outside of the NHS?

The NHS is not the only option for getting support to help you cope with a mental health problem: some organisations offer free or low-cost help or there are services that can be paid for privately, though these won't be an option for everyone as they may be expensive.

### Why might I decide to seek help outside of the NHS?

Some common reasons for considering seeking help outside the NHS might be:

- You're not receiving the support you want from your NHS GP.
- You want to access support more quickly.
- You're looking for a specialist treatment or more choice of treatments and providers.
- You want more intensive support, or support over a longer period of time.
- You want access to medication that isn't provided through the NHS.

## How do I access private health care or therapy?

You can:

- ask your NHS GP to refer you or make a suggestion
- search online for a private health care provider and contact them directly
- use an online listing service, such as Patient.co.uk's search facility.

## Private counsellors or therapists

You can find a therapist through the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) ([www.itsgoodtotalk.org.uk](http://www.itsgoodtotalk.org.uk)). Any therapist you find through this website will have signed up to the BACP's ethical framework, which means they must:

- behave in a professional and safe way towards you
- explain their responsibilities regarding confidentiality
- tell you their complaints procedure if you ask for it

## Employer support

Find out if your employer has any specialist support services, by speaking with your occupational health unit. They may offer:

- Employee Assistance Support helpline
- peer support
- counselling
- multi-faith chaplaincy
- (fire and rescue) Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD)
- (ambulance and police) Trauma Risk Management (TRiM)

## Specialist emergency services organisations

There are organisations that specialise in supporting the mental health and wellbeing of emergency service staff. Contact Mind's Blue



Light Infoline (0300 303 5999, open 9am to 6pm, Monday to Friday) to find out about other organisations that can help you.

### Voluntary, community and charity sector organisations

These include:

- local Minds
- counselling centres
- community or charity organisations

These kinds of services are normally free or low cost, and can offer a range of support, such as:

- talking treatments
- peer-to-peer support
- arts and alternative therapies
- advice services
- online services like forums, live chat or peer support

### How do I find these kinds of services?

- Mind's Blue Light Infoline can give you details of mental health help and support in your area in England (0300 303 5999, open

9am to 6pm, Monday to Friday).

- Your occupational health unit might have information about services.
- Your GP or health care provider might also be able to give you details of more local organisations.

You can often self-refer to these services, and you may also be referred by your GP.

### How do I get help in a crisis?

A crisis is any situation in which you feel you need urgent help. For example, you might feel in crisis if:

- you are having suicidal thoughts and feelings
- you are having thoughts about harming yourself or someone else
- you have seriously hurt yourself

The table on page 15 gives some general information on how you can get help in a crisis.

What's happening	Ways you can get help
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• you think you may act on suicidal feelings, or you have seriously harmed yourself</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• you can go to any hospital A&amp;E department and ask for help (if you need to, you can call 999 and ask for an ambulance)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• you are feeling extremely distressed, or are experiencing suicidal feelings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• you can contact the Samaritans on 116 123 (freecall, available 24 hours, 365 days a year)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• you need medical help or advice fast, but it's not an emergency</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• you can call NHS 111(England, Wales, Scotland)</li> <li>• you can contact your GP and make an appointment for as soon as possible</li> <li>• You can call Lifeline (Northern Ireland) on 0808 808 8000</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• you're worried that you might experience a crisis in the future</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• for information on how to plan for a crisis and other types of crisis support, see Mind's web page on crisis services (go to <a href="http://www.mind.org.uk">www.mind.org.uk</a> and search 'crisis services')</li> </ul>



## 4. Seeking help for others

### What should I say to someone with a mental health problem?

If your colleague had a broken leg, you probably wouldn't think twice about asking how they were. Anyone can experience a mental health problem, so being able to talk about it is important to us all. And you don't need to be an expert on mental health. Often, small everyday actions can make the biggest difference.

#### Show your support

If you know someone has been unwell, don't be afraid to ask how they are. They might want to talk about it, or they might not. But just letting them know they don't have to avoid the issue with you is important. Just spending time with the person lets them know you care and can help you understand what they're going through.

#### Ask how you can help

People will want support at different times in different ways, so ask how you can help. For example, if your colleague wants to get more exercise, you could do this together.

#### Be open-minded

Phrases like 'Cheer up', 'I'm sure it'll pass' and 'Pull yourself together' definitely won't help. Be non-judgemental and listen. The person experiencing a mental health problem often knows best what is helpful for them.

#### Don't just talk about mental health

Keep in mind that having a mental health problem is just one part of the person. People don't want to be defined by their mental health problem, so keep talking about the things you always talked about.

#### Show trust and respect

Mental health problems can seriously damage a person's self-esteem, and make them feel like they are personally and professionally worthless. By showing your colleague trust and respect at work, you can help to rebuild and maintain their sense of self-esteem. This will also help you to cope, as you will hopefully see your support having a positive impact on your colleague.

#### Look after yourself

It is important to maintain your own mental wellbeing – if you become unwell you will be less able to offer support.

## How can I support a colleague to seek help for their mental health problem?

Our research shows that emergency services personnel are just as likely to seek help from a colleague as from a GP, so the support you offer can be really valuable.

If a colleague lets you know that they are ready to seek help for their mental health problem, there are lots of things you can do to support them. For example:

- **Listen.** Simply giving someone space to talk freely, without interruption or judgement, can be really helpful in itself. If they're finding it difficult, let them know that you're there to listen when they are ready.
- **Stay calm.** Even though it might be upsetting to hear that your colleague is distressed, try to stay calm. This will help them feel calmer too, and show them that they can talk to you openly without upsetting you.
- **Be patient.** You might want to know more details about their thoughts and feelings, or want them to get help immediately. But it's important to let them set the pace for seeking support themselves.

- **Try not to make assumptions.**

Your perspective might be useful to your colleague, but try not to assume that you already know what may have caused their feelings, or what will help.

- **Keep social contact.** Part of the support you offer could be to keep things as normal as possible. This could include involving your colleague in social events, or chatting about other parts of your lives.

- **Learn more about the problem they experience, to help you think about other ways you could support them.**

Mind's website ([www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)) provides lots of information about different types of mental health problems, including pages on what friends can do to help.

## What can I do if someone doesn't want my help?

If you feel that your colleague is clearly struggling but can't or won't reach out for help, and won't accept any help you offer, it's understandable to feel frustrated. But it's important to accept that they are an individual, and that there are always limits to what you can do to support another person.

You can't:	You can:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Force someone to talk to you.</b> It can take time for someone to feel able to talk openly, and putting pressure on them to talk might make them feel less comfortable telling you about their experiences.</li> <li>• <b>Force someone to get help</b> (if they're over 18, and are not posing immediate danger to themselves or someone else). As adults, we are all ultimately responsible for making our own decisions. This includes when – or if – we choose to seek help when we feel unwell.</li> <li>• <b>See a health care professional for someone else.</b> A doctor might give you general information about symptoms or diagnoses, but they won't be able to share any specific advice or details about someone else without their consent.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Be patient.</b> You won't always know the full story, and there may be reasons why they are finding it difficult to ask for help.</li> <li>• <b>Offer support and reassurance.</b> Let them know you support them and you'll be there if they change their mind.</li> <li>• <b>Inform them how to seek help when they're ready.</b> For example, you could show them the previous section on seeking help for yourself.</li> <li>• <b>Look after your own mental wellbeing,</b> and make sure you don't become unwell.</li> </ul>

If you're worried about your colleague and you're not sure what to do, you can call the Mind Blue Light Infoline. Our Infoline can give you confidential, independent and practical advice to help you support your colleague.

0300 303 5999 (Monday to Friday 9am to 6pm)

text: 84999

[bluelightinfo@mind.org.uk](mailto:bluelightinfo@mind.org.uk)

## How can I help someone experiencing suicidal feelings?

Suicidal feelings can be frightening and painful for the person who is experiencing them, as well as for those around them. If someone you know is experiencing suicidal feelings, here are some things you can do:

### Try not to judge

If someone you know is thinking about taking their own life, it's understandable to feel shocked, frightened or angry. However, it's important to try not to judge that person or blame them for the way they are feeling. Often, finding someone who is prepared to listen and be supportive is the first step towards a person seeking help.

### Talk to the person about how they feel

If you think someone is suicidal, one of the most important things you can do is to talk to them about how they feel and be there to listen. Even just giving them time to talk by listening and reflecting back what they have said can be very helpful.

It's okay to ask someone about their suicidal feelings. Talking about suicide will not put the idea into their head, but will encourage them to talk about their feelings.

It's understandable that you may feel pressure 'to say the right thing', but remember by just being there and listening in a compassionate way, you are helping that person to feel less isolated and frightened.

### Encourage them to get help

Even when someone appears to be absolutely determined to take their own life, it is important to explore every possible option and source of support with them. You could talk to them about the idea of getting help and ask them how they feel about this. By doing this, you can start to encourage them to get support. This may be by going to see a therapist or a counsellor. See our previous section on seeking help for yourself for ideas on where to start.

### Ask them how you can help

Someone may know what helps them or what has worked in the past. If they know, they can tell you what it is. If they don't, you could have a conversation with them about what you can do and perhaps write a support plan together. It is important they agree to the help you offer.

### Help them stay safe

If someone is feeling suicidal and talks to you about intending to end their life, stay with them. Remove anything that could cause harm, such as sharp objects.

## Help them think about positive things

Exploring reasons for living can be a positive way of supporting someone who is feeling suicidal.

*Even when I've been in the midst of despair and unable to see any way forward, being reminded that suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary state of affairs has helped me focus on the hope that all things pass.*

## Look out for warning signs

It can be very difficult to recognise when someone is intending to take their own life; a suicide attempt can seem to come suddenly, and sometimes the person might go to great lengths to hide these feelings. If someone often experiences suicidal feelings, they may know their own warning signs and might be able to tell you what these are or write them down. This could help you to look out for the signs in the future.

### Warning signs to watch out for include:

- someone taking less care of themselves, for example eating badly or not caring what they look like
- a sense of uselessness and having no purpose – feeling “What’s the point?”
- someone talking about ending their life or about suicide in general

- a marked change of behaviour – someone may appear to be calm and at peace for the first time or, more usually, may be withdrawn and have difficulty communicating
- stressful events at work
- experiencing bereavement or loss
- feelings of shame
- isolation or loneliness
- loss of self-esteem
- sleep problems
- use of suicide-promoting websites

If you’re worried that someone is at immediate risk of taking their own life, you should stay with that person and take one of the following steps:

- encourage them to ring the Samaritans, 116 123, open 24 hours a day
- contact their GP for an emergency appointment or the out of hours service
- ring 999 or NHS direct on 111 (England, Scotland and Wales)
- go to the nearest A&E department
- Call Lifeline in Northern Ireland on 0808 808 8000.

If someone has attempted suicide, you should ring 999 and stay with them until the ambulance arrives.

## How can I look after myself?

Supporting someone experiencing a mental health problem can be stressful. Making sure that you look after your own wellbeing can mean that you have the energy, time and distance to help someone else. For example:

- **Take a break when you need it.** If you're feeling overwhelmed by supporting someone or it's taking up a lot of time or energy, taking some time for yourself can help you feel refreshed.
- **Talk to someone you trust about how you're feeling.** You may want to be careful about how much information you share about the person you're supporting, but talking about your own feelings to a friend while maintaining confidential information can help you feel supported too.
- **Be realistic about what you can do and don't take too much on.** Your support is really valuable, but it's up to your colleague to seek support for themselves. Remember that small, simple things can help, and that just being there for them is probably helping lots.



## 5. Getting organised around mental health

UNISON branches have an important role to play to support members experiencing mental health problems and to fight for improvements to how employers support staff with mental health issues. This section outlines some of the ways that branches can help.

### Where do we start?

#### Reduce the stigma around mental health

Helping staff maintain good mental health starts with reducing the stigma that surrounds disclosure of mental health. UNISON branches can help with this by using positive messaging and giving space for people to talk about mental health.

#### Include the whole branch

A great place to start is having the conversation at branch level. Speak to other representatives about their experiences, both personal and also in supporting members. The whole branch can be involved in campaigning and promoting mental health. Some will have a more specific role in bargaining and negotiating improvements. These involve using organising opportunities and the whole branch working together to support

members.

- **Branch negotiators** can play a key role in ensuring employers have appropriate mental health policies, which are used and referred to regularly, and campaigning for improved provision of mental health support services and Employee Assistance Schemes in the workplace. See Resources at end of this section.
- **Health and Safety reps** can play a key role in ensuring a good-quality working environment exists that supports employee wellbeing and also reviewing appropriate health and safety measures such as workstation assessments, proper eye-care, safety equipment and cold/hot weather provision.
- **Union Learning reps** can play a key role in education, information and training. This could include line manager training, peer support groups and mental health awareness for managers, reps and staff to help them spot the signs and respond appropriately.



- **Branch Welfare Officers** can play a key role in supporting individual members and reps, including signposting access to support services and information on managing their condition.

### Ensure reps have the knowledge and training they need

A trade union rep can provide confidential advice and support, without the formality of speaking to a HR officer or manager. As a result, it's important that trade union reps feel comfortable and confident to talk and listen to colleagues about their mental health problems.

UNISON representatives will also find themselves supporting members with existing or new mental health issues. Due to the nature of the work in the emergency services, these are more likely to include complex mental health illness such as severe depression and PTSD.

It is therefore important that trade union reps know their limitations as non-health professionals and have the right information to signpost colleagues to appropriate advice, treatment and support services. Therefore, time off and training for union reps is essential so that they are aware of what to do, and where to send people for more specialist help.



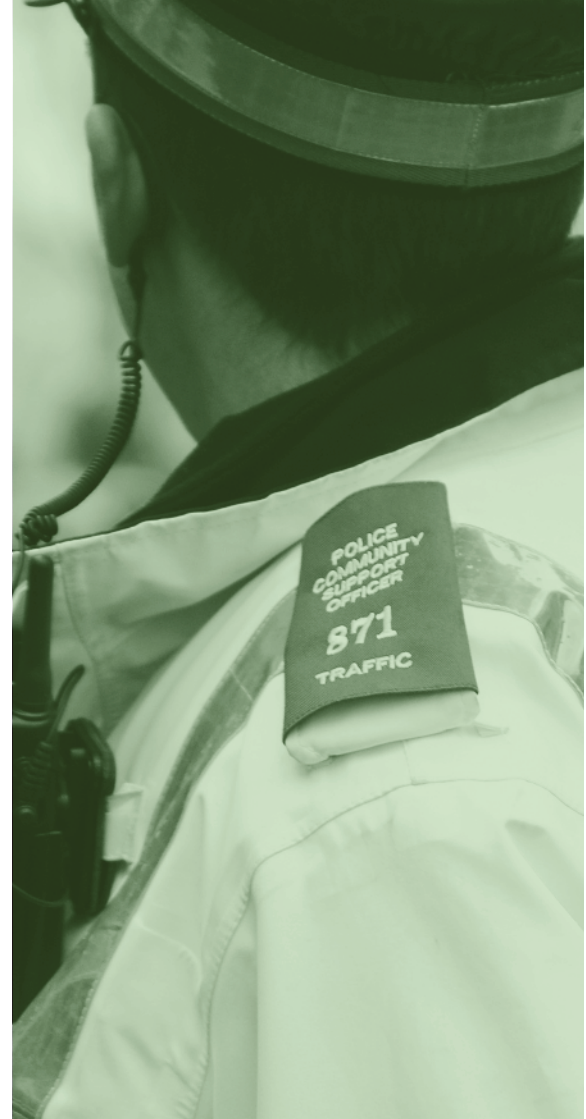
UNISON runs a Mental Health at Work course for activists. For more details contact your union learning rep.

### Help prevent discrimination linked to mental health issues

Many workers may be worried about raising issues with their manager. However, early disclosure from the member to the employer or trade union rep about the extent and nature of the illness may be helpful if an employee later experiences discrimination because of their mental health problem.

This requires managers and reps to ask the right questions and to have received training in raising such issues. This in turn helps the rep to negotiate appropriate return to work plans and long term reasonable adjustments. Input from external agencies can be helpful, for example letters and recommendations from Occupational Health and GPs. An early referral to Occupational Health might be vital.

Section 15 of the Equality Act 2010 – discrimination arising from a disability – can be helpful where employers are trying to discipline members for behaviour or alleged misconduct which is directly linked to the impact of mental ill-health.



## How can I work with my employer to help staff with mental health issues?

- Sign the Mind Blue Light **Time to Change** pledge or deliver an existing pledge **[www.mind.org.uk/bluelight](http://www.mind.org.uk/bluelight)**
- Reduce the stigma that surrounds disclosing mental health issues by providing positive messages around mental health and ensuring line managers receive correct training on how to support staff with mental health issues. Mind have developed a tailored course for managers working in emergency services. Find out at **[www.mind.org.uk/bluelight](http://www.mind.org.uk/bluelight)**
- Work together to ensure that your employer recognises that people experiencing mental ill-health can still be successful at work and offers the right levels of reasonable adjustment or support necessary to those who experience mental health issues
- Review policies to ensure the right level of support for staff experiencing mental ill-health including proactive support for those managing complex mental health issues
- Seek to reduce discrimination in recruitment and selection processes for people with mental health issues by using positive statements and ensuring practices are based on the Equality Act 2010

## Campaigning ideas for trade union reps

Changing culture and breaking down stigma takes time so it is well suited to campaigning activity. It will help to create a supportive environment: be open about mental health, talk about your branches' campaign to ensure good workplace practice on mental health and let members know that you're there if they need to talk - so that all members of staff feel comfortable to raise an issue.

- Talk openly about mental health and wellbeing, use non-discriminatory language and challenge stigma and discrimination. Download Time to Change resources here: **[www.time-to-change.org.uk/resources](http://www.time-to-change.org.uk/resources)**
- Promote good mental health and wellbeing for colleagues across your workplace - download health promotion materials such as the Five Ways to Wellbeing **[www.mind.org.uk/work](http://www.mind.org.uk/work)**

- Highlight available training from Mind such as Managing Mental Health at Work training - or contact local mental health charities to enquire about other training opportunities. Find out more here: **[www.mind.org.uk/work](http://www.mind.org.uk/work)**
- Lobby your organisation to support the Time to Change campaign and sign the Blue Light or Time to Change employer pledges. Chart their development towards becoming an exemplar employer. Find out more here: **[www.time-to-change.org.uk/get-involved/get-your-workplace-involved](http://www.time-to-change.org.uk/get-involved/get-your-workplace-involved)**
- Mark World Mental Health Day (10th October) in your workplace. Display posters and leaflets about mental health around your workplace, in staff rooms or canteens to better inform colleagues about mental health and where/ how they can access help and support.
- Support Time to Change at: **[www.time-to-change.org.uk/](http://www.time-to-change.org.uk/)**  
Invite a Time to Change Champion to speak to TU and management groups to help increase their understanding of mental health problems, stigma and discrimination. Invite local mental health organisations to come and talk to the branch.

## Resources

There are some excellent resources for branches including:

- The TUC guide '*Representing and supporting members with mental health problems at work*'  
**[https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Representing\\_mentalhealth.pdf](https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Representing_mentalhealth.pdf)**
- The TUC '*Mental health at work: A young workers' guide*'  
**[www.tuc.org.uk/young-workers/mental-health-work-young-worker's-guide](http://www.tuc.org.uk/young-workers/mental-health-work-young-worker's-guide)**
- TUC Union learn '*Mental health and the workplace*'  
**[www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications/mental-health-and-workplace](http://www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications/mental-health-and-workplace)**
- UNISON runs a Mental Health at Work training course, available to branch activists.



# Mental health matters

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